

Advanced Methods of Interpretation in Cultural Sociology

Title	Lecture (CSOn4003)	Seminar (CSO4004)
Course description	The lecture gives the students an overview over theories, methods and techniques of interpretation important for qualitative social research and cultural sociology. The first half deals with the fundamentals of interpretation, whereas the second half is devoted to different areas of research and specific methodological instruments. The lecture concludes with a written test, which consists of a question-and-answer part as well as an interpretation exercise as practical part.	The bi-weekly seminar accompanies the lecture with additional readings and interpretation exercises. Students should bring empirical material for discussion and interpretation from their own research projects. If there is no student material for a session, we will discuss fundamental texts and case studies instead. At the end of the course, students have to submit an interpretation essay as final paper.
Course objectives	Upon successful completion of the course, students should have a broad knowledge in methodology and methods of interpretation used in cultural sociology and related fields. Students should be able to deliver sociological interpretations of images and texts, including interviews and media discourses.	Upon successful completion of the seminar, students should have a deeper understanding of interpretation methods in cultural sociology and related fields. Furthermore, students will have gathered first-hand practical experiences with the interpretation of images and texts, which is important with regard to future qualitative research projects (e.g., MA thesis).
	Regular attendance and a written test based on the lecture and the obligatory readings.	Registration and attendance of the lecture (CSOn4003), participation in class and the submission of an interpretation protocol and a successful final paper.
Assessment Methods	1. Written test (90%): 90-100 = A, 80-89 = B, 70-79 = C, 60-69 = D, 50-59 = E, 0-49 = F 2. Participation in the lecture, for example through comments and questions (10%)	1. Participation in class (20%) 2. Interpretation protocol (20%) 3. Final paper (60%)
ECTS points	12	10

I	What is Interpretation? (18.2)	Seminar I (17.2)
Required Readings	Geertz, Clifford (2006): "Thick Description: Towards an Interpretative Theory of Culture". In: <i>The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays</i> . New York: Basic Books, 3-30. Reed, Isaac (2011): "Knowledge". In: <i>Interpretation and Social Knowledge. On the Use of Theory in the Human Sciences</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 15-38.	Interpretation Material: Trump's Inaugural Address 2025
Additional Readings	Eco, Umberto: (1992): <i>Interpretation and Overinterpretation</i> . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Taylor, Charles (1985): "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man". In: <i>Philosophical Papers 2. Philosophy and the Human Sciences</i> . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 15-57. Weber, Max (1978): <i>Economy and Society. Outline of an Interpretative Sociology</i> . Berkeley: University of California Press, 3-26.	
II	On Methodology (25.2)	
Required Readings	Thornberg, Robert & Kathy Charmaz (2014): "Grounded Theory and Theoretical Coding". In: Flick, Uwe (ed.), <i>The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis</i> . London; Thousand Oaks: Sage, 153-169. Timmermans, Stefan & Iddo Tavory (2012): "Theory Construction in Qualitative Research from Grounded Theory to Abductive Analysis". In: <i>Sociological Theory</i> 30(3), 167-186. Interpretation session with student material.	
Additional Readings	Abbott, Andrew (2004): <i>Methods of Discovery. Heuristics for the Social Sciences</i> . New York; London: Norton. Glaser, Barney G. & Anselm L. Strauss (2006): <i>The Discovery of Grounded Theory. Strategies for Qualitative Research</i> . New Brunswick; London: Aldine Transaction. Peirce, Charles Sanders (1998): "Pragmatism as the Logic of Abduction". In: <i>The Essential Peirce. Selected Philosophical Writings (1893 - 1913)</i> . Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 226-241. Weber, Max (1949): "'Objectivity' in Social Sciences and Social Policy". In: <i>The Methodology of Social Sciences</i> . Glencoe: Free Press, 49-112.	
III	Understanding: Phenomenological Hermeneutics (4.3) / C. Szaló	Seminar II (3.3)
Required Readings	Ricoeur, Paul (2007): "The Task of Hermeneutics". In: <i>From Text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics II</i> . Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 53-74. Soeffner, Hans-Georg (2004): "Social Scientific Hermeneutics". In:	Interpretation session with student material.



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	Steinke, Ines, Ernst von Kardoff & Uwe Flick (eds.): <i>A Companion to Qualitative Research</i> . London: Sage, 95-100.	
Additional Readings	<p>Palmer, Richard E. (1973): "Phenomenology as Foundation for a Post-Modern Philosophy of Literary Interpretation." <i>Cultural Hermeneutics</i> 1 (1):207–223.</p> <p>Dilthey, Wilhelm (1990): "The Human Studies". In: Jeffrey C. Alexander & Steven Seidman (eds.): <i>Culture and Society. Contemporary Debates</i>. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 31-38.</p> <p>Gadamer, Hans-Georg (2006): <i>Truth and Method</i>. New York: Continuum.</p>	
Case Studies	<p>Weber, Max (2001): <i>The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism</i>. London, New York: Routledge.</p> <p>Geertz, Clifford (2006): "Deep Play. Notes on the Balinese Cockfight". In: <i>The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays</i>. New York: Basic Books, 412-453.</p>	
IV	Structuralism and Poststructuralism (11.3)	
Required Readings	<p>Saussure, Ferdinand de (2011): <i>Course in General Linguistics</i>. New York: Columbia University Press, 111-122.</p> <p>Hawkes, Terence (2003): <i>Structuralism and Semiotics</i>. London; New York: Routledge. 1-43.</p>	
Additional Readings	<p>Lévi-Strauss, Claude (1974): "Structural Analysis in Linguistics and Anthropology". In: <i>Structural Anthropology</i>. New York: Basic Books, 31-51.</p> <p>Frank, Manfred (1989): <i>What is Neostructuralism?</i> Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.</p> <p>Derrida, Jacques (2002): "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences". In: <i>Writing and Difference</i>. London; New York: Routledge, 351-370.</p>	
Case Studies	<p>Barthes, Roland (1990): <i>The Fashion System</i>. Berkeley: University of California.</p> <p>Barthes, Roland (1991): <i>Mythologies</i>. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.</p> <p>Lévi-Strauss, Claude (1971): <i>The Elementary Structures of Kinship</i>. Boston: Beacon Press.</p> <p>Lévi-Strauss, Claude (1961): <i>Tristes Tropiques</i>. New York: Kriterion, 160-180.</p> <p>Smith, Philip (1991): "Codes and Conflict. Toward a Theory of War as a Ritual". In: <i>Theory and Society</i> 20(1), 103-138.</p>	
V	Structural Hermeneutics I (18.3)	Seminar III (17.3)
Required Readings	<p>Alexander, Jeffrey C. & Philip Smith (2010): "The Strong Program. Origins, Achievements, Prospects". In: John R. Hall, Laura Grindstaff & Ming-Cheng Lo (eds.): <i>Handbook of Cultural Sociology</i>. London; New York: Routledge, 13-24.</p>	Interpretation session with student material.



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	Alexander, Jeffrey C. & Philip Smith (2003): „The Discourse of American Civil Society“. In: Alexander, Jeffrey C. (ed.), <i>The Meanings of Social Life. A Cultural Sociology</i> . Oxford: Oxford University Press, 121-154.	
Additional Readings	Emirbayer, Mustafa (2004): “The Alexander School of Cultural Sociology”. In: <i>Thesis Eleven</i> 79(1), 5-15. Alexander, Jeffrey C. & Philip Smith (2003): “The Strong Program in Cultural Sociology. Elements of a Structural Hermeneutics”. In: <i>The Meanings of Social Life. A Cultural Sociology</i> , Oxford: Oxford University Press, 11-26.	
Case Studies	Alexander, Jeffrey C. (1988): “Culture and Political Crisis. ‘Watergate’ and Durkheimian Sociology”. In: Alexander, Jeffrey C. (ed.), <i>Durkheimian Sociology. Cultural Studies</i> . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 187-224. Alexander, Jeffrey C. (2010): <i>The Performance of Politics. Obama's Victory and the Democratic Struggle for Power</i> . Oxford: Oxford University Press. Smith, Philip (2008): <i>Punishment and Culture</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press.	
VI	Structural Hermeneutics II (25.3)	
Required Readings	Mannheim, Karl (1968): “On the Interpretation of ‘Weltanschauung’” [excerpt]. In: <i>Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge</i> . London: Routledge, 43-63. Bohnsack, Rainer (2014): “Documentary Method”. In: Flick, Uwe (ed.), <i>The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis</i> . London; Thousand Oaks: Sage, 217-233. Wernet, Andreas (2014): “Objective Hermeneutics”. In: Flick, Uwe (ed.), <i>The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis</i> . London; Thousand Oaks: Sage, 234-246.	
Additional Readings	Mannheim, Karl (1968): “On the Interpretation of ‘Weltanschauung’”. In: <i>Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge</i> . London: Routledge, 33-83. Oevermann, Ulrich, Allert Tilman, Elisabeth Konau & Jürgen Krambeck (1987): “Structures of Meaning and Objective Hermeneutics”. In: Meja, Volker & Dieter Misgeld (eds.): <i>Modern German Sociology. European Perspectives</i> . New York: Columbia University Press, 436-447. Titscher, Stefan, Michael Meyer, Ruth Wodak & Eva Vetter (2003): <i>Methods of Text and Discourse Analysis</i> . London; Thousand Oaks: Sage, 198-212.	
Case Studies	Mannheim, Karl (1986): <i>Conservatism. A Contribution to the Sociology of Knowledge</i> . London: Routledge. Mann, Stefan (2007): “Understanding Farm Succession by the Objective Hermeneutics Method”. In: <i>Sociologia Ruralis</i> 47(4), 369-383. Mišić, Ana (2020): “Together divided–divided together: Intersections of symbolic boundaries in the context of ex-Yugoslavian immigrant communities in Vienna”. In: <i>Ethnicities</i> 20(6), 1071-1092.	



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VII	Reading Week (1.4) – No Teaching	
Required Reading	Reed, Isaac (2011): <i>Interpretation and Social Knowledge. On the Use of Theory in the Human Sciences</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 89-162.	
XIII	Dean's Day (8.4) – No Teaching	
IX	Interpretation of Artifacts and Practices (15.4)	Seminar IV (14.4)
Required Readings	Gell, Alfred (1998): <i>Art and Agency. An Anthropological Theory</i> . Oxford: Clarendon, 12-50. Latour, Bruno (1991): "The Berlin Key or How to Do Words with Things". In: Graves-Brown, Paul (ed.), <i>Matter, Materiality and Modern Culture</i> . London: Routledge, 10-21.	Interpretation session with student material.
Additional Readings	Keane, Webb (2005): "Signs Are not the Garb of Meaning. On the Social Analysis of Material Things". In: Miller, Daniel (ed.), <i>Materiality</i> . Durham; London: Duke University Press, 182-205. Bourdieu, Pierre (1990): <i>The Logic of Practice</i> . Stanford: Stanford University Press. Reckwitz, Andreas (2002): "Toward a Theory of Social Practices. A Development in Culturalist Theorizing". In: <i>European Journal of Social Theory</i> 5(2), 243-265. Reckwitz, Andreas (2002): "The Status of the 'Material' in Theories of Culture: From 'Social Structure' to "Artefacts"". In: <i>Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour</i> 32(2), 195-217.	
Additional Material	Žižek, Slavoj (2004): "Knee-Deep", <i>London Review of Books</i> , September 2. Peach, Eric Crassoi (2012): "Žižek on Toilets and the Christchurch Rebuild", <i>Project Freerange</i>	
X	Interpretation of Pictures (22.4)	
Required Readings	Panofsky, Erwin (1955): <i>Meaning in the Visual Arts. Papers in and on Art History</i> . Garden City: Doubleday, 26-54. Foucault, Michel (1973): "Las Meninas". In: <i>The Order of Things. Archaeology of the Human Sciences</i> . New York: Vintage Books, 3-18. Binder, Werner & Bernadette N. Jaworsky (2018): "Refugees as Icons: Culture and Iconic Representation". In: <i>Sociology Compass</i> 12(3).	
Additional Readings	Bartmanski, Dominik (2012): "The Word/Image Dualism Revisited. Towards an Iconic Conception of Visual Culture". In: <i>Journal of Sociology</i> .	



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	<p>Bohnsack, Ralf (2010): "The Interpretation of Pictures and the Documentary Method". In: Bohnsack, Ralf et al. (eds.): <i>Qualitative Analysis and Documentary Method in International Educational Research</i>. Opladen: Budrich, 267-309.</p> <p>Emmison, Michael & Philip Smith (2000): <i>Researching the Visual. Images, Objects, Context and Interactions in Social and Cultural Inquiry</i>. London: Sage.</p> <p>Przyborski, Aglaja & Thomas Slunecko (2012): "Learning to Think Iconically in the Human and Social Sciences: Iconic Standards of Understanding as a Pivotal Challenge for Method Development". In: <i>Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science</i> 46(1), 39-56.</p>	
Debate on "Las Meninas"	<p>Searle, John R. (1980): ""Las Meninas" and the Paradoxes of Pictorial Representation". In: <i>Critical Inquiry</i> 6(3), 477-488.</p> <p>Snyder, Joel (1985): ""Las Meninas" and the Mirror of the Prince". In: <i>Critical Inquiry</i> 11(4), 539-572.</p> <p>Schmitter, Amy M. (1996): "Picturing Power: Representation and Las Meninas". In: <i>The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism</i> 54(3), 255-268.</p>	
XI	Texts, Narratives, Interviews (29.4)	Seminar V (28.4)
Required Reading	<p>Nohl, Arnd-Michael (2010): "Narrative Interview and Documentary Interpretation". In: Bohnsack et al. (eds.): <i>Qualitative Analysis and Documentary Method in International Educational Research</i>. Opladen: Budrich, 195-217.</p> <p>Pugh, Alison J. (2013): "What Good are Interviews for Thinking about Culture? Demystifying Interpretative Analysis". In: <i>American Journal of Cultural Sociology</i> 1(1), 42-68.</p> <p>Smith, Philip (2005): <i>Why War? The Cultural Logic of Iraq, the Gulf War, and Suez</i>. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 18-27.</p>	Interpretation with student material.
Additional Readings	<p>Campbell, Joseph (2004): <i>The Hero of a Thousand Faces</i>. Princeton: Princeton University Press.</p> <p>Frye, Northrop (2000): <i>Anatomy of Criticism</i>. Four Essays. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press.</p> <p>Propp, Vladimir (1984): <i>Theory and History of Folklore</i>. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.</p> <p>Lamont, Michèle & Ann Swidler (2014): "Methodological Pluralism and the Possibilities and Limits of Interviewing". In: <i>Qualitative Sociology</i> 37(2), 153-171.</p> <p>Smith, Philip (2005): <i>Why War? The Cultural Logic of Iraq, the Gulf War, and Suez</i>. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.</p> <p>Swidler, Ann (2005): <i>Talk of Love. How Culture Matters</i>. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.</p> <p>White, Hayden V. (1973): <i>Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe</i>. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.</p> <p>Wuthnow, Robert (1988): "Religious Discourse as Public Rhetoric". In: <i>Communication Research</i> 15(3), 318-338.</p>	



Debate on Interviews	Vaisey, Stephen (2014): "Is Interviewing Compatible with the Dual-process Model of Culture?" In: <i>American Journal of Cultural Sociology</i> 2(1), 150-158. Pugh, Allison J. (2014): "The Divining Rod of Talk. Emotions, Contradictions and the Limits of Research". In: <i>American Journal of Cultural Sociology</i> 2(1), 159-163.	
XII	Critical Hermeneutics (6.5) / C. Szaló	
Required Readings	Ricoeur, Paul (2007): "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology" In: From Text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics II. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 270-307. Reed, Isaac (2011): "Utopia". In: <i>Interpretation and Social Knowledge. On the Use of Theory in the Human Sciences</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 67-88.	
Additional Readings	Habermas, Jürgen (1989): <i>The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society</i> . Cambridge: MIT Press. Ricoeur, Paul (1970): <i>Freud and Philosophy. An Essay on Interpretation</i> . New Haven: Yale University Press, 20-36. Ricoeur, Paul (1973): "The Model of the Text. Meaningful Action Considered as a Text". In: <i>New Literary History</i> 5(1), 91-117.	
XIII	Discourse Analysis (13.5)	Seminar VI (12.5)
Required Readings	Laclau, Ernesto (1993): "Discourse". In: Robert E. Goodin (ed.): A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy, Oxford: Blackwell, 431-437. Foucault, Michel (1971): "Orders of Discourse". In: <i>Social Science Information</i> 10(2), 7-30. Fairclough, Norman (1989): "Discourse as Social Practice". In: <i>Language and Power</i> . Harlow; New York: Longman, 17-42.	
Additional Readings	Fairclough, Norman (2000): <i>New Labour, New Language</i> . London; New York: Routledge. Foucault, Michel (1973): <i>The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences</i> . New York: Vintage Books. Lakoff, George (2006): <i>Moral Politics. How Liberals and Conservatives Think</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Wagner-Pacifici, Robin Erica (1986): <i>The Moral Morality Play. Terrorism as Social Drama</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Alexander, Jeffrey C. (2010): <i>The Performance of Politics. Obama's Victory and the Democratic Struggle for Power</i> . Oxford: Oxford University Press. Smith, Philip & Nicolas Howe (2015): <i>Climate Change as Social Drama</i> . Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.	



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Final Exam	Seminar Work
5 out of 10 questions regarding theories and methods discussed in the lecture or the required readings 1 out of 3 interpretative exercises	Interpretation protocol of 10+ pages Final paper of 18-20 pages Deadline: August 31, 2024
Additional Literature	
<p>Alexander, Jeffrey C. & Steven Seidman (1990, ed.): <i>Culture and Society. Contemporary Debates</i>. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.</p> <p>Alexander, Jeffrey C. (2003): <i>The Meanings of Social Life. A Cultural Sociology</i>. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.</p> <p>Alexander, Jeffrey C., Bernhard Giesen & Jason L. Mast (2006, eds.): <i>Social Performance. Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual</i>. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.</p> <p>Alexander, Jeffrey C., Dominik Bartmanski & Bernhard Giesen (2012, eds.): <i>Iconic Power. Materiality and Meaning in Social Life</i>. New York; Hounds Mills: Palgrave.</p> <p>Andersen, Niels Åkerstrøm (2003): Discursive Analytical Strategies. Understanding Foucault, Koselleck, Laclau, Luhmann. Bristol: The Policy Press.</p> <p>Back, Les, Andy Bennett, Laura Desfor Edles, Margaret Gibson, David Inglis, Ronald Jacobs & Ian Woodward (2012): <i>Cultural Sociology. An Introduction</i>. Malden; Oxford: Wiley Blackwell.</p> <p>Binder, Werner (2018): "The semiotics of social life". In: <i>American Journal of Cultural Sociology</i> 6(2), 401-416.</p> <p>Bohnsack, Ralf, Nicolle Pfaff & Vivian Weller (2010, eds.): <i>Qualitative Analysis and Documentary Method in International Educational Research</i>. Opladen: Budrich.</p> <p>Edles, Laura Desfor (2002): <i>Cultural Sociology in Practice</i>. Malden; Oxford: Blackwell.</p> <p>Fairclough, Norman (2003): <i>Analyzing Discourse. Textual Analysis for Social Research</i>. London; New York: Routledge.</p> <p>Fairclough, Norman & Isabela Fairclough (2012): <i>Political Discourse Analysis. A Method for Advanced Students</i>. London; New York: Routledge.</p> <p>Flick, Uwe (2009): <i>An Introduction to Qualitative Research</i>. London; Thousand Oaks: Sage.</p> <p>Flick, Uwe (2014, ed.): <i>The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis</i>. London; Thousand Oaks: Sage.</p> <p>Giddens, Anthony (1993): <i>New Rules of Sociological Method. A Positive Critique of Interpretive Sociologies</i>. Stanford: Stanford University Press.</p> <p>Michel, Johann (2019): <i>Homo Interpretans</i>. London; New York: Rowman & Littlefield.</p> <p>Raud, Rein (2016): <i>Meaning in Action. Outline of an Integral Theory of Culture</i>. Cambridge; Malden: Polity.</p> <p>Ricoeur, Paul (1976): <i>Interpretation Theory. Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning</i>. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press.</p> <p>Riessman, Catherine Kohler (2008): <i>Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences</i>. London: Sage.</p> <p>Smith, Philip (1998, ed.): <i>The New American Cultural Sociology</i>. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.</p> <p>Smith, Philip & Alexander Riley (2009): <i>Cultural Theory. An Introduction</i>. Malden: Blackwell.</p> <p>Steinke, Ines, Ernst von Kardoff & Uwe Flick (2004, eds.): <i>A Companion to Qualitative Research</i>. London: Sage.</p>	



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